

Just when baseball thought they were starting to get out from behind the Steroid Era and move forward, we get a leak last week that the sport's biggest star was one of the 104 players that tested positive in 2003. And now, when we should be talking about pitchers and catchers reporting and split squad games, the steroid discussion is once again front and center. In Gary's latest Lingering Items, he hits on a number of the steroid related news stories dominating the baseball landscape.



Yea, it matters...

There is a point at which fans become so jaded by the constant revelations of off-the-field shenanigans by those who play the sport that they'd just rather ignore it all. Just play the game. The revelations that baseball's arguably most talented player and certainly its highest paid was a steroid abuser (and may be, still, who knows?) doesn't seemed to have twanged the buds of the average fan.

I understand that sentiment. Frankly, I'm tired of hearing about steroids and baseball as much as anyone. But that doesn't mean that the onslaught of steroids allegations should just be swept away like the 2008 Cleveland Browns' season. This stuff does matter far more than whether or not Eric Mangini painted the walls inside the Brea a shocking pink.

The steroids era, as it's becoming known, has literally robbed baseball of its underlying integrity. Records have been established. Players and owners have been rewarded on the backs of a ticket paying public and the networks paying increasingly exorbitant broadcast rights fees. Part of the reason your cable bill is so high is because ESPN passes those fees right on to you. But far too much of those accomplishments and those riches have been earned under false

pretenses. There's something fundamentally wrong with that.

It does make a difference if Barry Bonds owns the home run record and not Hank Aaron. It matters if a Roger Clemens exceeds the accomplishments of a Bob Feller or a Nolan Ryan. When the records and accomplishments of the sport's icons fall to someone who used illegal means to do it, the fabric of the game begins to unravel.

In every sport cheaters are punished. If a high school or college team uses an ineligible player, the player is banned and the team forfeits the game. If the team won a championship, the banner is stripped and the record book expunged. But a major league baseball team winning games with players who are using performance-enhancing drugs aren't punished in the least. Yet arguably those wins are far more in doubt than those of a college team using a player that got a "D" in a course but the professor reported it as a "C";

It would be great if baseball could put the steroid era behind it. Everyone would breathe a sigh of relief. But ignoring the black mold metastasizing in the corner of the room because you're too scared or tired or whatever to contemplate its ramifications isn't the answer. The only way to address the problem is to clean it up for good. Rid the sport of the players whose performance was fraudulent. Force out the owners who hid in their luxury boxes in order to avoid confronting the seedy underbelly of their clubs. Rid the sport of the commissioner who fiddled why Cooperstown burned. Demonstrate true zero tolerance and not 10 strikes and "I'm sorry" or else face accepting the next inevitable scandal that could ultimately prove to be even worse.

We now return to our regular programming.

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Stupid is as stupid does...

Problem, what problem?

In a nutshell, that's essentially the position of Marvin Miller, the legendary architect of the absolute worst union in professional sports, the Major League Players Association. Wheeled out as if on cue every time there is a problem in baseball, the 91-year old Miller had plenty to say about the Alex Rodriguez situation and almost none of it is going to help.

Among the more [controversial statements he gave to ESPN](#) was that the union should never have bowed to public and congressional pressure to institute a drug testing program in the first place. In Miller's view, there is absolutely no evidence that steroids actually enhance performance. Thus it is pure folly to test for them because all that ends up doing is causing a boat load of unintended consequences, the Rodriguez situation being just the most current example.

It would be easy to dismiss the comments of Miller as those of a doddering old fool still trying to look relevant. But Miller is no fool. He's misguided, certainly, ill-informed, obviously, but absolutely nobody's fool. He more than anyone else, is responsible for the establishment and adherence still to outdated horse-and-buggy thinking on almost any issue of relevance in baseball and these comments just perpetuate his antiquated thinking.

His ESPN interview created a veritable cornucopia of other misstatements and half-truths as well. Miller claimed rather boldly that there is no evidence that the use of steroids is even a health issue, pulling out the old "cigarettes cause far more damage and responsible for 400,000 deaths a year" as if that's even a relevant comparison. In Miller's world, steroids use has not been involved in "one documented death."

That's just Miller parsing for convenience of argument without bothering to check it for consistency. Claiming steroids hasn't been a factor in several deaths is just plain false. For example, Lyle Alzado was 42 years old when he died of brain cancer. Alzado himself in his last days attributed his condition to his extensive misuse of steroids. There have been at least 5 pro "wrestlers" who have died in their 30s from various forms of coronary disease and all were abusers of anabolic steroids. The web site [Athletes Against Steroids](#) maintains a list of steroids-related deaths and notes, too, that most steroids-related deaths are not of high profile athletes and thus go mostly unreported. If Miller was being consistent, let alone genuine, then he'd have to say that cigarettes aren't causing any deaths because no one is dying while taking a drag. It's all that coronary disease and emphysema that's really causing the deaths.

But even if Miller wants to play that game, it's beyond question that the continued abuse of steroids has serious health consequences. You can Google "health effects of steroids" and find 486,000 entries to back that up. ESPN did an extensive series on the issue (see story [here](#)) that details the short and long-term adverse impact that steroid use has on an individual, both physically and psychologically. If Miller doubts the uncontroverted medical evidence, then he should be made to produce one scientific study to the contrary. He can't.

Miller then trotted out the well-worn argument that drug testing is inherently unreliable because of the potential for false-positive results. This is a perfect example of a half-truth. What Miller doesn't say is that the protocols of drug testing, particularly in professional sports, are so rigorous as to render false positives nothing more than a myth. Drug tests are conducted in phases. The initial test is more generalized and it is in that test where false positives may get reported. But any positive test in this phase is then submitted to a far more exacting test to eliminate the chance of a false positive. Ask Floyd Landis.

Personally, my favorite Millerism though was his statement that the union leadership was wrong to bow to the overwhelming pressure put on it by its own members to agree to random drug testing. According to Miller, "leadership can't just take a poll on what membership wants. You also have to judge whether

this is in the best interests of the people you represent. If the entire membership voted unanimously to disband, would you do it?" In other words, just because the members want something doesn't mean it's in their best interests. And yes, by law actually, if the entire membership voted unanimously to disband, the union would disband, so there.

Miller always has been a polarizing figure in baseball. On the one hand his hard-nosed bargaining tactics advanced the cause of the players and, in the process, made the players' union *the* strongest sports union. On the other hand, the next idea he has that's in the best interest of baseball (as opposed to the best interest of an individual player) will be the first. It's never been Miller's agenda to further the interest of the sport, so it's no surprise that he's not doing so now. But to not appreciate how damaged the sport is by advocating for positions that would only further that damage may not make you a fool, but it does render you irrelevant.

See ya, Marvin. We'll call you the next time your help is needed. And if the phone isn't ringing, it's us.

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If only he had acted like he couldn't speak English...

Somewhat lost in the Rodriguez affair was the news item that Houston Astros' shortstop Miguel Tejada pleaded guilty on Wednesday to lying to congressional investigators about what he knew about steroids use in baseball. According to a report in the USA Today, Tejada admitted he lied when he told investigators in 2005 essentially that "i don't know nothing about no stinking steroids." Now Tejada awaits sentencing and is hoping against hope that probation is in his future.

What's instructive about the Tejada situation is the simple fact that it underscores why investigating steroids use is so difficult. When George Mitchell undertook his investigation, the players' union essentially told its members not to cooperate. That's something they could get away with because Mitchell had no subpoena power and was not working under the color of law in order to compel cooperation.

But when a congressional investigator, working under the color of law and with subpoena power comes knocking, one is well advised not to dodge the questions or, as in the Tejada's case, lie with impunity.

This is something that has to give pause to dear old Roger Clemens. Right now his testimony to Congress is under scrutiny and on that front, things aren't going well. It's one thing to damage your reputation by being exposed as a cheat. It's a whole other matter to find your abscessed butt in a jail cell. Clemens may just see this all as another batter that he can send back to the bench with a series of fastballs. Sooner or later he'll find out he was wrong.

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A fool for a client...

Speaking of Clemens, this week a judge dismissed most of the defamation lawsuit that he filed against his former BFF, Brian McNamee. The dismissal was mostly on procedural grounds. The statements McNamee told congressional investigators, for example, are immune from a lawsuit. Most of the other statements McNamee made that weren't otherwise immune were made in New York and thus if Clemens wants to sue him for those, he'll have to re-file the case in New York.

There still is one count left in the lawsuit relating to statements McNamee allegedly made to Andy Pettitte about Clemens' steroids use. If Clemens decides

to continue to pursue that, he'll be in the rather awkward position of having to depose his other BFF, Pettitte. The problem there is that Pettitte has already gone on record as vouching for McNamee's credibility. Be careful what you ask for, Roger.

My guess is that this lawsuit will die the natural death it deserves. It was filed in the wake of the storm surrounding the Clemens allegations and was meant to deflect attention by portraying Clemens as . Clemens and his attorney probably never really intended to pursue it to a conclusion because doing so would put the entire Clemens family in play. But then again, Clemens has proven time and again that as a family man, he was a good pitcher so anything's possible.

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This Bud's for you...

It's been a busy week for The Worst Commissioner in the History of Organized Sports, Bud Selig. When the Rodriguez story broke, he gave his usual furrowed brow look of concern and talked, half-heartedly, about possibly suspending Rodriguez.

But that was never a viable option. There simply is no mechanism in place to suspend Rodriguez for misconduct occurring 8 years ago and Selig knew that even when he initially made the statements. That's why he almost immediately backed down from that threat and simply left it as is by doing what Selig does best, wringing his hands while scolding Rodriguez as if he were Selig's 16-year old kid and he had just creased a right corner panel on the family sedan. That had to hurt.

Frankly, Selig moralizing to Rodriguez will be about as effective as anything else Selig as done throughout his slumbering tenure as commissioner. The truth is

that the revelations about Rodriguez say at least as much about Selig's reign as they do about Rodriguez. If Rodriguez is telling the truth (a risky assumption, I know) that the culture of just a few years ago fostered his drug use, then how on earth could Selig not be clued in to that? The only way he could have avoided it was, essentially, by deliberately avoiding it. But deliberate ignorance hardly erases the underlying acts. If it did then a refusal to watch the Pittsburgh Steelers win another Super Bowl would mean it didn't happen. If only....

What's truly amazing about this whole situation is that despite the fact that the longest, darkest and most shameful period ever visited upon professional baseball has occurred under Selig's watch, those that employ him don't seem to much care. During that time, all the owners have done is continue to elevate Selig's status and salary without even once trying to hold him the least bit accountable. Maybe it's because they know they are just as culpable. A band of brothers, indeed.

By this point, Selig's become the sports equivalent to Ken Lay, the former (and now deceased) CEO of Enron. While essentially overseeing a criminal enterprise, each disclaimed either knowledge or intent and both profited handsomely. I guess for his sake it's a good thing that Congress has its hands full with the banks at the moment.

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There was an item in the Plain Dealer on Friday where several Cleveland Indians, including Cliff Lee, essentially gave Rodriguez and others a pass for their steroids abuse. The players, too, apparently are tired of this whole mess and just want to move on. Thus this week's question to ponder: Would Lee still feel the same way if he had lost a perfect game by giving up a home run to a player who later admitted he was on steroids?